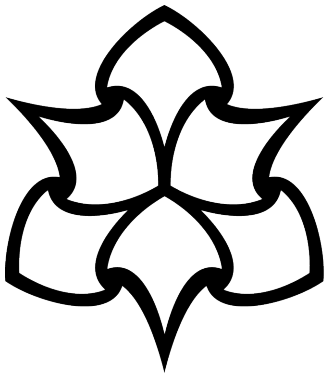

LAN-PLAN
Central Lancashire New Town 1965-1986

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Abstract

From 1965 Lancashire, in the North West of England, became the focus of a major renewal scheme: the creation of a new 'super-city'. The last and largest New Town designated under the 1965 Act, the proposed city, called Central Lancashire New Town (CLNT), differed from other New Towns. Although influenced by the ideals and example of Garden City model, its master plan was based on the region's existing urban poly-centricity that had evolved during the Industrial Revolution. By unifying and supplementing existing townships it aimed to generate prosperity on a sub-regional scale using the New Towns Act, rather than creating a single new urban development. Although only part-realised the scheme became a focus for Lancashire's industrial and urban revival, rejuvenating many existing communities and providing multiple municipal modern city-scale civic buildings in Lancashire's towns.

The paper will outline the origins, intentions and achievements of CLNT including examples of its modern and often brutalist architectural legacy. As urban design precedent, it is pertinent to the Town and Country Planning Association's current national campaign to continue the work of the Garden City movement as well as regional debates concerning Lancashire's future urban redevelopment, particularly Preston (the proposed sub-regional centre of CLNT), which was granted City status in 2002.

Keywords: Central Lancashire New Town; Leyland; Preston; Chorley; Garden-City.

In September 2013 Preston Bus Station (figure 1) was granted grade II listed status after a thirteen-year campaign to save it from demolition (Klettner, 2013). Preston City Council (2012) have argued that the building was no longer viable as it was twice the size currently needed by the city and too expensive to refurbish and maintain. The largest in the UK and second largest in Western Europe, the bus station had been designed by the Building Design Partnership (1959-70) to serve a new city called Central Lancashire New Town (CLNT) that had been proposed for the north west of England during the 1960s under the New Towns Act (1965). If realised the city would have been the third largest in

the region, after Manchester and Liverpool, and its master-plan, which was being developed simultaneously to the bus station's design, could have accommodated a predicted population increase from 253,000 people in 1966 to 503,000 in 1991 over 51,460 acres. Designated in 1970 CLNT is significant because it was the last and largest of the third generation new towns proposed in Britain between 1961 and 1970 and it demonstrated an unprecedented application of the Act. Over a period of thirty years the strategy, configuration and scale of a New Town for central Lancashire changed leaving an interesting architectural legacy dispersed across the region and, as in the case of Preston Bus Station, a contemporary debate concerning the future of its city-scale buildings.

Figure 1. Preston Bus Station, Lancashire, designed by the Building Design Partnership, 1959-70, (the author).

Pioneer Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) conceived the British new town movement during the nineteenth century when in 1898 he published his proposals for a new city form in *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform.* Howard had been critical of squalid living conditions, disorganised growth and congestion caused by the rapid expansion of large towns during the industrial revolution, particularly London. By proposing an alternative city type based on

an urban pattern, Howard attempted to control urban development. He promoted the advantages of living in close proximity to both town and country and employed four key principles – the lower and upper limitation of population numbers and area; growth by colonisation; variety and sufficiency of economic opportunities and social advantages; and control of land in the public's interest. A permanent green belt of mainly agricultural land restricted city growth and guaranteed the extents of urban settlement. As well as distributing the concentration of people and workplaces in urban areas, Howard's scheme boosted densities of smaller towns and reinstated vitality and services to rural regions that had declining populations.

Adoption of Howard's ideas and recognition as a national policy through the establishment of Britain's first New Town's Act of 1946 was slow. Howard had established the Garden City Association in 1899 (now the Town and Country Planning Association), a small but pro-active group that promoted the Garden City idea through its journal and arranged meetings and conferences across the country. Four years later he set up the First Garden City Company and piloted his proposals through the design and build of the unprecedented experimental town of Letchworth (1903-4), Hertfordshire, 35 miles from London (Osborn et al, 1969, 66). Although Howards' ideas gained intrigue, they remained uncopied for decades. The second demonstration of his concept at Welwyn Garden City (1919-20) was more successful and, probably due to an increased demand for new housing during the inter-War years, had gained international recognition by the 1930s due to its successful industrial growth, social liveliness and outstanding quality of design.

In 1938 Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940), the new British Prime Minister, assigned a Royal Commission chaired by Sir Anderson Barlow (1868-1951) to advise on urban densities and the distribution of population and industry. Published in 1940, the *Barlow Report* reiterated the problem of large towns and recommended 'planned decentralization'. It was not until after the Second World-War that the principle of population displacement to facilitate the redevelopment of Britain reignited interest in New Towns. A New Towns Committee, established in 1945, considered their delivery and configuration and

the passing of two revolutionary Acts – the New Towns Act 1946 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, followed. Welwyn became part of the first generation of New Towns when a government appointed Development Corporation adopted it under the New Towns Act in 1948. The need for 20 new towns had been identified and between 1947 and 1950 fourteen had been started – twelve in England (eight to relieve London) and two in Scotland. After 1961 came a second wave of new towns and by 1968 eight more were in progress (six in England and two in Scotland) (figure 2). During the late 1960s changes to the New Towns Act allowed Development Corporations to co-operate with local councils to plan major expansions of existing towns to create regional or sub-regional centres and undertake urban development over extensive areas already containing a number of small towns and villages not suitable for individual expansion. These were not new towns but large-scale town expansions.

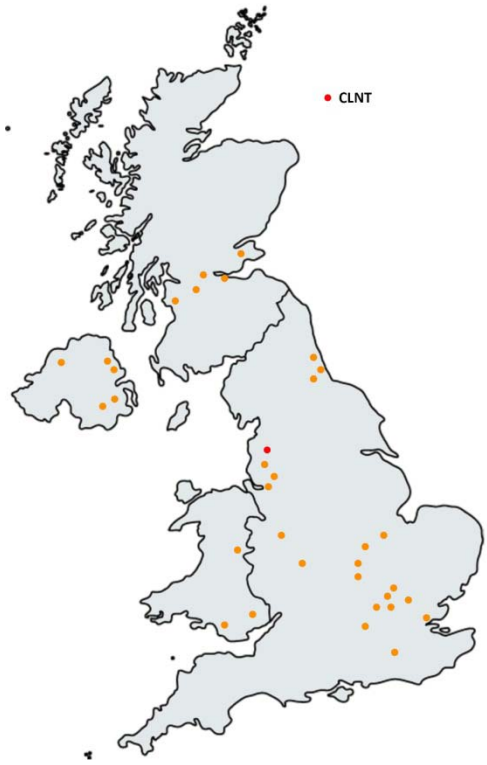

Figure 2. Proposed and constructed New Towns, 1965 (the author).

During the 1960s, Lancashire achieved three New Towns - Skelmersdale (1961), Runcorn (1964) and Warrington (1968) to address population overspill from Liverpool and Manchester. In 1965, Richard Crossman, then Minister of Housing and Local Government, commissioned Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall and Partners (RMJM) to undertake preliminary studies for a fourth New Town at central Lancashire. Entitled *Study for a City,* the report marks a long evolutionary process and period of consultation to determine the location and form of the New Town as well as its impact on adjacent settlements. Defined by agricultural belts to the north and west, hills and moors to the east and Wigan's coalfield to the south, the geographical area considered for the designation area included Preston, Leyland and Chorley. In 1965 Preston was an administrative and communications centre serving a wide hinterland with its port, service industry and retail facilities. Chorley was a compact small self-sufficient market town with parkland to the West and Rivington Reservoirs and Anglezance Moors to the east. Leyland had experienced rapid incoherent growth as an important flourishing manufacturing and industrial town. These towns had a combined population of 250,000 and were in close proximity to improved north/ south main infrastructure routes.

Two decades earlier Lancashire County Council had identified the need for New Towns to solve the region's immense housing problems. In 1949, the Minister of Town and Country Planning had asked Lancashire County Council to determine locations for New Towns and town extensions to accommodate 47,500 people from congested county boroughs (*The Manchester Guardian,* 14 November, 1950, 5). To be viable sites needed to be within travelling distance of Merseyside and Manchester, pose few constructional difficulties and be of sufficient distance from existing urban areas to ensure economic and geographic independence. In addition Preston also needed to address its local housing shortages. *Towards a Prouder Preston,* a publication by the County Borough of Preston's Town Planning and Development Committee (1946, 6), reported that half the town's housing had been built in the last 60 to 100 years; one-sixth

needed to be demolished as part of slum clearances and 750 new dwellings would be needed over the next 20 years.

A post-war advisory plan, *A Preliminary Plan for Lancashire* (Brown, 1951) was prepared. Initially this was not the official mandatory Statutory Development Plan, it was a progress report designed to identify the character and scale of problems that the development plan must solve, such as population redistribution, industrial development, housing needs and conservation of agricultural land. Its foreword, written in March 1950 by the County Councillor A. E. Higham, Chairman of the County Planning and Development Committee, described the current conditions,

> anyone who lives in Lancashire must realise the extent to which a once lovely countryside has been largely transformed into a densely populated industrial area. That in itself was probably inevitable, but the way in which it has occurred is in the most cases a sad story of untidy, unhealthy, overcrowded and unplanned development, both in regard to housing and industry. (Brown, 1951, vi)

In March 1950 a review of the interim edition of the preliminary plan published in the *Manchester Guardian* reported that the number of people from devastated industrial towns and cities, in particular from Manchester and Liverpool, who needed to be rehoused due to post-war housing shortages and slum clearances, had increased to 639,000 (3 March, 8). Three potential New Town locations to accommodate 132,800 people were identified - Parbold, Garstang and Leyland, plus significant expansions to eight towns and minor expansions to forty areas in the region, but the New Towns were omitted from the approved Lancashire County Council's development plan of 1956 (NTC/4/1/82, 1968).

A review of the Lancashire County Development Plan (Lancashire Planning Department, 1962) revisited the idea of a New Town for central Lancashire. It again identified Leyland as a possible location for large-scale development due to its proximity to the new M6 motorway and high levels of employment in the

motor manufacturing industry, primarily at British Leyland. In 1964, the County Planning Officer produced a 'Preliminary Technical Report on the Future of Central mid-Lancashire' that focused on the Chorley-Leyland area (Coates). This outlined a vision to create a 'new and contemporary urban environment as the modern alternative to the traditional suburban relief from city frustrations' and claimed that areas already containing well-established towns and cities could accommodate substantial population increase. Identifying Chorley, Leyland and Preston's suburbs as focal points for expansion it stated that a large number of people could live together without the disadvantages of some cities and that new development could provide the catalyst needed to support future communities. Similar to Ebenezer Howard's utopian ideas the report described a pattern of land use that aimed to provide well-positioned and sufficient industry, open space, compact amenities and public services. Journey times could be limited to 30 minutes to open country, 20 minutes to work and 10 minutes to local shops and school. This report provided the concept for RMJM's study.

RMJM's study for Central Lancashire New Town was organised into two phases. First, within 12 months, to advise the Minister on the area to be designated under the New Town Act of 1965, and second, to produce a master-plan by April 1968, which would be handed over to the Development Corporation. RMJM's brief had been to identify a '*growth zone in this part of Lancashire which would improve the social and economic well-being of the whole region, contribute to its industrial revival and the renewal of the older towns, and provide for some of the housing and other development needs of the south east Lancashire conurbation'* (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967, 1). In summarising the current conditions RMJM (1967, 29) reported that '*the whole area immediately south of Preston gives the impression of non-descript housing development in which large scale renewal has been and is still prejudiced by infilling. It presents the most difficult environmental and renewal problems of any of the urban concentrations in the study area'*. The subsequent master-plan needed to accommodate a predicted population increase from 253,000 in 1966 to 503,000 in 1991 over 51,460 acres, 44,187 acres of which had been identified as suitable for development. Four key criteria needed to be satisfied – the

integration of new and existing developments to promote urban renewal including raising the quality of existing development and maintaining a clear contrast between town and country; the phasing of construction in self-contained locations which have appropriate urban character; the integration of all forms of private and public transport, whilst segregating vehicles and pedestrians; land use should accommodate changing circumstances and eventual growth beyond the predicted population intake but not necessarily within the designated area.

The study presented a theoretical urban strategy that assigned diverse types of buildings and amenities to individual community units. Four sizes of units were discussed: neighbourhood, district, township and city. Cities, with a population of 300,000-500,000, would have a full range of facilities such as concert hall, zoo and botanical garden. Based on a strategy of multi-centred growth centres, RMJM stated that

> if a new city can be created by the close inter-connection of a number of rapidly growing townships whose central functions are continuously expanded in parallel with growth, the whole complex will then attract the complete range of city scale facilities which are at present regionally available only in the congested cores of Liverpool and Manchester. (RMJM, 1967, 55)

Major functions would be dispersed amongst the townships to give each place a clear identity and function within an integrated urban complex. These would be served by a 'three strand' infrastructure model to enable each location to function independently and as part of a city. This comprised two longitudinal high-speed by-pass roads and, to allow movement between townships and districts by express public transport, a spine road connected to transverse routes.

Existing communities needed to be expanded to accommodate 128,000 additional people including 112,000 south of the Ribble, leaving 122,000 accommodated in two New Towns as greenfield developments. Preston was proposed as the administrative, retail and service industry core. Its central area

would need to be enlarged, improved and remodelled including a new bus station at Spring Gardens to permit access to the east end of town centre and market. Chorley's population would increase to 51,000 to become a township and Leyland, which RMJM identified as having most potential to expand and acquire new functions, would increase to 70,000, requiring a new social and shopping area, possibly outside the present urban area. The study concluded the area was capable of accommodating around half a million people.

Prior to CLNT's designation, Preston Corporation had commissioned Grenfell Baines and Hargreaves in 1959 (who later became Building Design Partnership in 1961) to design a new bus station and 500 capacity car park. The initial brief aspired to collate the town's dispersed termini of bus services. As the idea for a New Town in central Lancashire developed over the next six years, the size, role and importance of the bus station increased to create a prestigious public building that would be '*unrivalled in size and facilities in England [and] the Continent'* (*The Architect's Journal,* 1970, 1134). On completion the *Architectural Review* concluded that the building's '*imposing scale seems doubly right for a future mini-metropolis'* (1970, 33). 171metres long, the bus station can accommodate 80 double-decker buses nose-on and 1100 cars on split-level decks above. Cantilevered curved edges of the concrete car decks create ribbed canopies to protect passenger platforms from weather. A central spine of passenger facilities and offices divides the ground floor concourse into two large waiting halls. The building later became part of a wider retail, entertainment and office complex linked by raised walkways and subways to segregate pedestrian and vehicular movement. This included the Guild Hall and Charter Theatre by RMJM (1969-73), commissioned to commemorate the 1972 Preston Guild, which is also currently threatened with demolition (BBC News Online, 2013).

Figure 3. Leyland Magistrates' Court, Lancastergate, Leyland, Lancashire, designed by Lancashire County Council Architects, 1970 (the author).

In Leyland a civic core was started. Two examples of township civic architecture by Lancashire County Council Architects' Department are the Magistrates' Court and Library at Lancastergate, Leyland, 1970. The Magistrates' Court (figure 3) is a dominant grey brick box topped with two copper roof pyramids. Key features of the street elevation are the wide external staircase and a band of vertical concrete fins which define the windows and six single-leaf entrance doors. Vertical windows are repeated on the side elevations. Adjacent to the court is the library. Also in grey brick with three acute roof pyramids, this is a single-storey brutalist building.

Figure 4. Cuerden Pavilion, Cuerden Hall, Lancashire, designed by Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall, 1971 (the author).

The headquarters of Central Lancashire New Town's Development Corporation was first building constructed for the city following the New Town's designation in 1970 (figure 4). The Development Corporation had selected Cuerden Hall and Park for its location, a historic building of local interest set within mature grounds and diplomatically placed in the centre of the designation area with no apparent favouritism to Preston, Chorley and Leyland. At the time Cuerden Hall was occupied by the armed forced and was due to be vacated in 1973, when it was to become a public amenity. Designed by RMJM, the building is noteworthy due to its rapid construction and its simple and elegant expression. The close working relationship of architect, engineer and quantity surveyor and the careful selection of materials enabled it to be completed in four months (*The Architect's Journal*, 13 September 1972). Unified by a generous flat roof, the external envelope comprises a lightweight prefabricated timber and glass external walls set back from a framework of standard rolled steel sections to form a shaded cloister. Internally, two permanent central service cores subdivide an adaptable

office space that offers views into the landscape. Originally the building employed an interesting use of colour. External uncased steelwork was painted yellow to contrast against the mature trees and shaded external walls. Internal block work partitions were left unplastered apart from cork-lined walls in the meeting rooms and the service cores which were plastered and painted red.

In November 1973 the Development Corporation published a draft outline plan which would require a £900 million investment (at 1973 prices) from both private and public funders (*The Guardian,* 1973). 72,000 new homes were to be built in villages of about 3000-5000 people, grouped into districts of approximately 20,000. Substantial recreation areas were planned for the Ribble and Lostock Valleys including facilities for watersports, equestrianism and a zoo. These proposals then progressed into an outline master-plan which was published in 1974 (figure 5). A public enquiry and the acquisition of land then commenced. However, by 1976 national funding for New Towns was revaluated as Ministers were concerned that inner city areas were starting to suffer economically and the following year *The Times'* front page reported that CLNT's population increase target needed to be significantly reduced to 23,000 people (*The Times,* 1977, 1). During the 1980s New Towns were privatised and CLNT's Development Corporation was dissolved at the end of 1985.

On a national level, across the 20 English New Towns which had been started, 340,000 new homes, 10.5 million square metres of factory accommodation, 1.3 million square metres of offices and 6,500 shops had been constructed. In Lancashire where preparations had been made for a new city the legacy includes a range of large-scale public buildings, some in low-density town centres which have been supplemented by large scale residential areas.

Today central Lancashire faces similar challenges to those encountered during the 1960s – the redevelopment of its numerous post-industrial centres and population migration due to limited employment opportunities. It also has considered Preston's centre's regeneration through the abandoned Tithebarne redevelopment (2005-2011) following achievement of its City status in 2002. In light of the current trend in the UK to promote Garden Cities as an option to

address national housing shortages, perhaps the part-completed precedent of Central Lancashire New Town may be worth reconsidering?

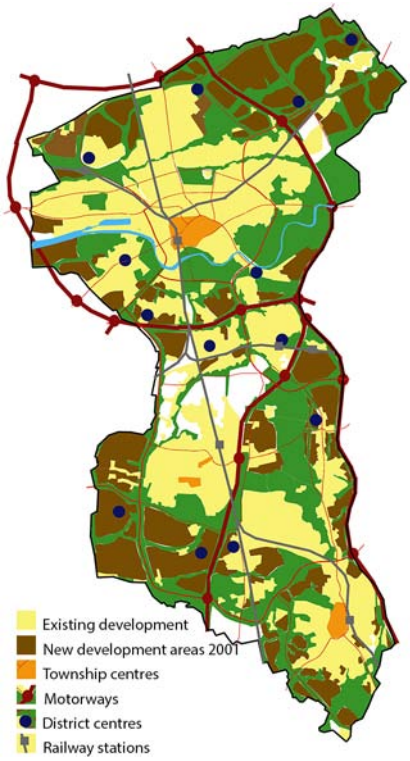

Figure 5. Analytical diagram of CLNT proposals, 1974 (the author)

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